

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EVACUATION OF SUVLA AND ANZAC

(Maps 4, 5; Sketches 31, 32)

Dec. STATED in its simplest terms, the problem involved in the evacuation of Gallipoli was the secret withdrawal and embarkation of an army of 134,000 men, 14,000 animals and nearly 400 guns.¹ The enemy's trenches were in some places less than ten yards distant from the British positions; and the open beaches from which the troops must embark were within effective range of the Turkish artillery. The coast was believed to be watched by enemy submarines;² it was the season of winter gales; and even a moderate sea would suffice to bring the embarkation to a standstill.

In point of fact the Government's decision to defer the evacuation of Helles to a later date was a stroke of fortune for the Expeditionary Force. The original outline scheme had contemplated a simultaneous embarkation at all three beaches—Helles, Anzac and Suvla—and if ample small craft had been available this would have been the safer course to pursue. But owing to the loss of small craft in the recent storms it would now only be possible to complete the final stage in three nights by using every available boat and lighter continuously and keeping none in reserve to replace those damaged by accident or enemy shell fire. This, in the eyes of General Birdwood's naval advisers, was an unjustifiable risk. Moreover, Birdwood and

¹ The actual figures at the end of November were:

Place.	Men.	Guns.	Animals.
Suvla	50,800	91	3,000
Anzac	41,300	105	2,368
Helles { British . .	32,070	124	5,712
{ French . .	10,558	73	3,501
Total	134,728	393	14,587

² On three occasions during December German submarines were reported off Gaba Tepe.

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his corps commanders were agreed that the final stage should Dec. on no account be spread over three nights. Not only would it be unsafe to count on three consecutive calm nights at this late season of the year. If the final stage could be completed in two nights there would be a chance of "hoodwinking" the Turks; but a third night would gravely increase the risk of discovery. Another serious objection was that owing to the recent damage to the Helles piers a withdrawal from that beach would be impossible for some time to come, and if Anzac and Suvla were to wait until all three beaches could be evacuated simultaneously the whole operation would have to be indefinitely delayed.

On the 1st December General Birdwood reported these difficulties to General Monro, and urged that a withdrawal from Helles should not be attempted till the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac was complete. At first Monro was disinclined to agree; and fearing the additional risk of postponing a withdrawal from Helles to a later date, he referred the matter to Admiral Wemyss. The admiral supported Birdwood, and the argument was finally closed by the Government's definite order. By a fortunate chance, though this aspect of the problem had never been put before them, the Cabinet had hit upon the one practicable plan.

By the 8th December good progress had been made with the re-embarkation of stores. A number of guns had also been sent away from the peninsula; and though it had been imperative to replace some of the wastage caused by the blizzard, the total garrison of Anzac and Suvla had been reduced to about 83,000 men. The withdrawals included the infantry of the 54th Division, the Essex Garrison Battalion and two field companies R.E.

Considerable progress had also been made, both at Anzac Nov. and Suvla, with the tactical plans for the withdrawal, all details of which, subject to any necessary co-ordination by Army Headquarters, General Birdwood had left to corps commanders.

At Anzac, in particular, most valuable work had been done. As early as the 22nd November General Birdwood had telegraphed to his old corps from Mudros that his own views were not likely to be accepted, and that evacuation was probable; and from that moment General Godley, in acting command of the corps, and Br.-General C. B. B. White, his Chief of Staff, had begun to devise their detailed plans for withdrawal.

General Godley's first step was to telegraph to General Birdwood on the night of the 22nd that if evacuation were to

Nov. be undertaken it should be done quickly and "without ostentation". The thought which underlay this phrase exactly coincided with General Birdwood's view, and the hoodwinking of the Turks was now made the keystone of General Birdwood's plan. In many quarters it had been taken for granted, when evacuation was first discussed, that the operation must consist of a gradual retirement which would almost certainly be followed up by the Turks. The chance of being able to embark the whole army without the knowledge of the enemy had not been seriously considered, and General Moncre was suggesting the explosion of mines in each area to cover the final withdrawal, and the adoption of an active offensive a few days before the final stage began.

Gradually, however, it began to be realized that if nothing was done to arouse Turkish suspicions; if the front line trenches were held to the very end; if the anchorages were never unduly crowded; if there were no marked change in the daily amount of shelling; and if the beaches and back areas remained to all appearances precisely normal, there was a reasonable chance that the Turks could be kept in ignorance that evacuation had started till after the last man had left the shore.

At Anzac the holding of the front-line trenches to the end was of overwhelming importance, owing to the proximity of these positions to the beaches on which the troops would have to embark. On Russell's Top the Turks would only have to advance 300 yards from their own front line to obtain command of the beach north of Anzac Cove at a range of less than 500 yards. It followed, therefore, that all reserves and supporting troops at Anzac would have to be embarked first, that the penultimate movement should be the gradual thinning of the front-line garrison, and the final step the withdrawal of the last troops in one bound to the beach.

In these circumstances General Godley decided on the 23rd November that as, with the gradual reduction of the garrison, the amount of rifle and artillery fire from the Anzac lines must necessarily tend to diminish, the Turks should at once be made accustomed to prolonged periods of almost complete silence. With this object he issued orders that from the following evening, for a period of three days, all normal sniping and artillery fire should cease, and that the enemy should only be fired on if he threatened attack or offered an exceptional target. By these periods of silence, which were continued at intervals, the Turks were successfully taught—often to their surprise and loss—that complete silence in a trench did not mean that its garrison had been withdrawn. The inauguration of this plan on the 24th

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November was another powerful factor in the success of the Nov. evacuation.

On the 25th November, on hearing that the Government's decision to evacuate was imminent, General Birdwood visited Anzac and Suvla in turn, and ordered the corps commanders¹ to formulate their own tactical plans. He approved the Anzac scheme for holding the front-line trenches to the end, and told the IX Corps to frame their scheme on similar lines.

By the 27th November both the Anzac and IX Corps had drafted their plans for withdrawal. Owing to the three days' blizzard it was not till the 30th that these proposals could be sent to Imbros; but on that date Generals Godley and Byng were able to take them across in person, and to attend a naval and military conference at Army Headquarters.²

General Byng had been contemplating the necessity of withdrawing from the Suvla position ever since the latter end of August; and a scheme for evacuation had been completed by his General Staff at that time. But as most of his trenches were further inland than those at Anzac, there had been no idea of trying to hoodwink the Turks by holding the front line to the end; and the plan had proposed a methodical contraction of the line, and a gradual retirement first to the support trenches and then to two final positions close to the beaches. As a result of General Birdwood's instructions this plan had now been slightly amended: General Byng would withdraw very gradually from the front line, but would hold it lightly, "if possible", to the end, meanwhile occupying his second line in strength. At the Army conference it was explained to General Byng that at Anzac the holding of the front line to the end was of vital importance, and it will be seen later that the IX Corps plan was eventually altered to conform.

Here it must be noticed that the re-flooding of the Salt Lake at Suvla had divided the IX Corps front, into two almost independent halves, and that, except *via* the front line, the only means of communication between the southern and northern halves was by way of the bridge across the Cut. General Byng had decided that all the troops to the north of the Salt Lake should be withdrawn towards the northern arm of Suvla Bay, known as Reserve Area A, and the troops to the

¹ General Godley was this day confirmed in the appointment of G.O.C. Anzac corps.

² Present: Generals Birdwood, Byng, Godley; Admiral Wemyss; their respective chief staff officers; the naval transport officers at Suvla and Anzac; and Captain F. H. Mitchell, R.N., attached as naval adviser to Army Headquarters. General Davies did not attend, but reported that evacuation from Helles was impossible for some weeks.

Nov. east or south of the lake to the southern arm, known as Reserve Area B. As soon as the possibility of evacuation was first mentioned to Byrg by General Monro he had begun to press forward the completion of reserve lines of defence in each of these areas. In Area A a strong second line was made from the coast north of Karakol Dag, *via* Hill 10, to the Cut, and a third line in rear to protect the beaches on the northern arm of the bay. In Area B a second line, called the New Salt Lake line, was constructed from the southern edge of the lake to the sea, and Lala Baba was converted into a veritable fortress to protect South Pier at the foot of that hill and C Beach south of Nibrunesi Point.

The Anzac corps scheme, drawn up under General Godley's direction by Br.-General C. B. B. White, was a model of precision and clear thinking. It stated that, granted fine weather and sufficiency of shipping, all the troops and guns to be withdrawn during the intermediate stage, together with the greater part of the animals, vehicles and stores at Anzac, could be safely evacuated in ten working days; and it urged that the final stage would be an extremely hazardous operation if prolonged for more than 48 hours.

The Anzac scheme provided that on the first night of the final stage all troops in support would be withdrawn as complete units, and the firing line thinned by removing companies from battalions and platoons from companies, the gaps in the line being filled by the extension of those remaining.¹ Throughout this night divisional organizations would remain intact, but the various divisional headquarters would withdraw when the night's programme was complete. One staff officer from each division would remain behind till the last night, with his headquarters on the beach in telephonic communication with brigades. Corps headquarters would also be withdrawn on the first night of the final stage and the command of the troops remaining till the last night would devolve upon a selected officer to be styled the rear-guard commander.

On the final night embarkation would be effected on a broad front, and troops on the flanks would retire straight to the beach in rear of them, where they would be embarked in ships' boats. For this purpose, in addition to the existing piers at Anzac Cove and Ocean Beach, special "embarkation-places" would be selected on each flank, and trestle piers would

¹ Embarkation during this night was to be effected from the piers at Anzac Cove and Ocean Beach by means of motor-lighters plying between the troop-carriers and the shore.

² Br.-General A. H. Russell was eventually selected for this important task.

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be constructed and hidden away at these places till the last Nov. moment. Detailed orders would be issued beforehand to all units as to the time for leaving the trenches, the route to be followed, and the hour of embarkation.

On this night the final garrison would be withdrawn in three parties; battalion commanders, in command of the rear-most parties, would remain to the very end. All telephone equipment would be rolled up and embarked by the rear parties; all stores left behind would be destroyed; and, in order that fire should not cease simultaneously in the front line, various devices would be used for the automatic firing of cartridges and bombs.

Particular stress was laid on the importance of preserving the normal appearance of the position throughout the evacuation. Bombing and sniping would be kept to its normal volume, the skeleton garrisons moving about to fire from different positions. The flanking destroyers should continue their normal routine, and throughout the hours of daylight there should be no sign of abnormal shipping activity. Hospital tents visible to the enemy would be left standing.

At a subsequent date General Godley decided to explode a large mine on Russell's Top to cover the final withdrawal from this dangerous locality on the last night, but though other mines would be prepared elsewhere, he deprecated firing them except in the case of emergency. He argued that the explosion of a large number of mines would not only be abnormal, but would bring shell fire on to his beaches and alarm the Turkish reserves.

With so many details already settled it was possible for Dec. General Birdwood, as soon as the Government's decision reached him on the 8th December, to issue instructions for the intermediate stage to begin at once, and the following day an Army conference was held at Imbros to concert the final plans.

It was then agreed that the final stage, both at Suvla and Anzac, must be completed in two nights, and, as the greatest number of troops that could be embarked in one night at either place was stated by the naval authorities to be 10,000, the final garrison at each place was fixed at a maximum of 20,000 men.

The existing garrisons on the 9th December were at Anzac 36,000 men and 97 guns and at Suvla 41,000 men and 91 guns. It was calculated that, weather permitting, the intermediate

Dec. stage—*i.e.* the reduction of these numbers to 20,000 at each place and the re-embarkation of the greater part of the guns, ammunition, animals, vehicles and stores—could be completed in approximately ten days, or, if more stores were sacrificed, at an even earlier date. In view of the daily increasing risk of foul weather, it was clearly advisable to start the final stage as early as possible; but here the ruling factor was the date by which the breakwater at Imbros could be repaired. Before the final stage could begin all the motor-lighters, upon which success would depend, would have to be concentrated at Imbros, and it was essential that, before this happened, there should be a safe refuge for these craft in the event of a sudden gale. The navy had requisitioned an old ship to fill the hole in the breakwater, and they now reported that this vessel would arrive in time to be sunk on the morning of the 19th. Thereupon it was decided that the intermediate stage must be completed by that morning, that the lighters should be sent to Imbros the same day, and that the final stage should be carried out on the nights of the 19th and 20th.

Two days later General Birdwood decided that it was courting failure to prolong the intermediate stage for an hour longer than necessary. At his request, therefore, the admiral agreed to use a brand-new collier to fill the gap in the breakwater, and orders were issued for the intermediate stage to be completed by the morning of the 18th, and for the final stage to take place on the nights of the 18th and 19th December. To the consternation of her master, the selected collier was sunk at Kephalo on the morning of the 18th; and this work was done so skilfully that the vessel was refloated three days later without having sustained any damage.

In General Birdwood's instructions for the evacuation, issued on the 10th December, the decision as to the number of men and guns to be retained for the final stage was left to corps commanders, subject only to the proviso that not more than 20,000 men must be kept at each place. During the intermediate stage the programme of evacuation would also be left to corps commanders. Tables were appended showing the exact amount of shipping that would be available for each stage. Guns, warlike stores and other valuable material were to be evacuated as early as possible in this stage, so that, if the tactical situation demanded its curtailment, the losses of valuable equipment would be by so much reduced.

¹ Actually 37 motor-lighters had now become available. Of these 7 were needed for rapid disembarkations at Mudros, 10 were allotted to Suvla, 10 to Anzac, and 10 (of which 7 would be a reserve) to Imbros.

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As for the final stage General Birdwood pointed out that he Dec. recognized that it might be impossible to embark any guns during that stage, but "any opportunity that offers for doing so without impeding the embarkation of personnel must be seized". Every gun left behind was to be so completely blown to bits as to make it worthless to the enemy even as a trophy.

The instructions continued that if it became necessary for any reason to abandon the intermediate stage before its programme had been completed, one or more nights, as necessary, would be added to the final stage in order to embark the balance of men left over; but in this case all further embarkation of guns, animals and stores would be abandoned.

As regards tactical details, General Birdwood confined himself to insisting that the final withdrawal from the front-line trenches at the junction of corps must be simultaneous, at an hour to be mutually arranged by corps commanders. He directed particular attention to such points as the complete destruction of all stores and ammunition that would have to be left behind, and to the necessity of maintaining the normal appearance of the beaches. There must be alternate periods of activity and quiescence in the trenches, and any troops rejoining their units in the near future were to be landed by daylight, in order to give the appearance that reinforcements were still arriving. A "keep" was to be prepared and rationed in each area, where any troops accidentally left behind on the last night could maintain themselves till embarked later.

On the 12th December General Birdwood issued orders for the final stage. In his anxiety not to hamper the corps commanders with too rigid instructions, he had hitherto refrained from any definite ruling as to the tactical plans to be adopted at this stage. He had now learnt, however, that the IX Corps commander, whose problem was somewhat different to that of the Anzac corps, was not in favour of holding all his front-line trenches to the last moment. In these circumstances, as on the Anzac front at least it was vital that this course should be adopted, General Birdwood now insisted that all the front-line trenches of the IX Corps must be held until nightfall on the last night, and that the trenches at the point of junction between the two corps must only be evacuated at an hour to be mutually arranged between the corps commanders. To make doubly sure of close co-operation, the left flank battalion of the Anzac corps was to withdraw under the orders of the IX Corps right flank division and embark with that division at Suvla.

The order gave a detailed list of the various ships and lighters

Dec. to be used on the two final nights. All these vessels would arrive in time to begin loading soon after dark on the first night. As soon as each ship had received her full complement of men she would proceed direct to her appointed destination (Mudros or Imbros), discharge her troops as rapidly as possible, and return to the beaches soon after dark on the final night. On the first night of the final stage, a destroyer or smaller vessel would be placed at the disposal of the corps commander at each place for the accommodation of himself and staff till the end of the evacuation.

By this date (12th December) it was already hoped that the evacuation would be many degrees less costly than anyone had at first expected. To be on the safe side, however, General Birdwood's order ended with the instruction that hospital accommodation for 2,000 patients, together with the necessary personnel for their care, was to be organized both at Suvla and Anzac, and left on shore to the last, to receive such cases as could not be embarked in the final stage. On the final night, if these preparations appeared excessive, corps commanders might use their discretion in withdrawing any medical personnel in excess of probable requirements.

Throughout this period, up to and including the last day of the final stage, General Birdwood paid daily visits to Suvla and Anzac, conferring with the corps commanders, spurring on the work of salving stores, and heartening the men by his frequent presence in the line. Every detail of the programme of withdrawal was scrupulously weighed and examined by the Army commander, and it was at his personal instigation, suggesting, or where necessary insisting, that many important improvements were made in the final plans.

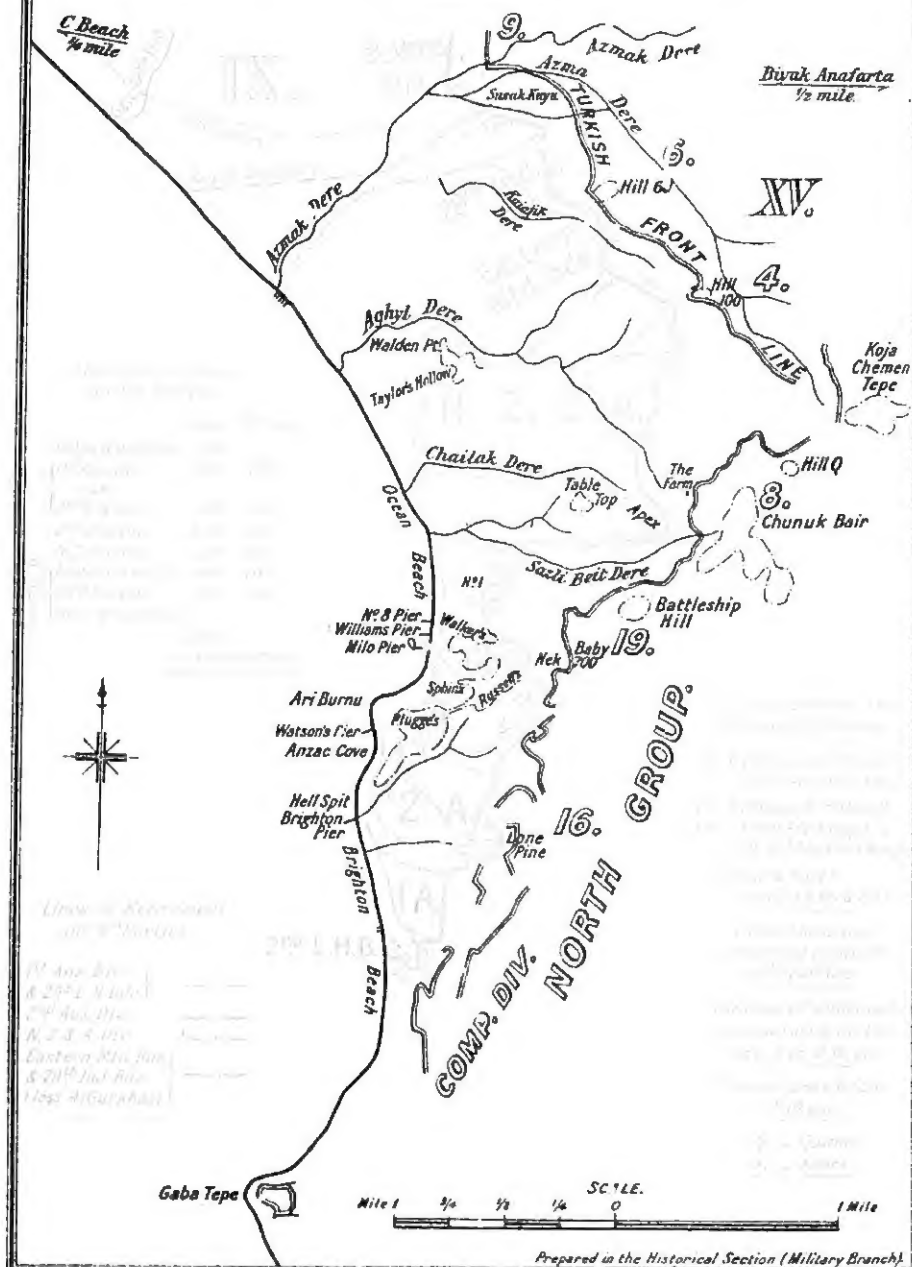
Both the Anzac and the IX Corps orders for the final stage were completed on the 14th December. Both were admirably clear, but differed in their conception. The Anzac order, in a few precise pages, reduced to its simplest terms the highly intricate problem that faced the corps. Every movement to be made by divisions and brigades was lucidly explained; the obvious soundness of the plan encouraged unquestioning compliance; and the whole tone of the order impressed its recipients with an invaluable and confident expectation of success.

The guiding principle of the Anzac scheme was a gradual reduction of the strength of the trench garrisons, the times of withdrawal being determined by the hour at which each detachment would be required to embark and the distance from the place of embarkation. On the first night 9,900 men would be embarked and 10,040 on the second night. Only 16 old guns

Sketch 31.

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Retirement of the "C" Parties, Night 19th/20th Dec.



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and one anti-aircraft gun would be kept for the final stage, and Dec. all of these would be retained till the last night.

In each divisional section divisional commanders would be responsible for the method by which the garrison for the last night should be distributed amongst the existing defences, and for subdividing the troops into three parties, called "A", "B" and "C".

On the last night the withdrawal of these three parties would also be made gradually, and, as each detachment began to withdraw, the troops still in the trenches would extend and maintain the usual rifle and bombing activity. Brigade commanders would embark with the last of the B parties,¹ and at this stage,¹ if all went well, the rearguard commander would also embark, handing over the command of all the C parties to Colonel J. Paton of the 7th Australian Brigade. A portion of the C parties, consisting of picked men, would be told off to cover the retirement of the remainder, and would fall back to an inner line of posts at No. 1 Post, Walker's Ridge, Plugge's Plateau and MacLagan's Ridge. The last men to embark would be a few troops of the 2nd Australian Division from the head of Walker's Ridge. Sketch 31.

It was characteristic of the spirit of the Anzac corps that unit commanders found great difficulty in selecting their C parties. Volunteers were called for, but this merely elicited the fact that every man in the battalion wanted to stay. Those who had served longest on the peninsula demanded the distinction as their right, while the new arrivals were equally insistent that the chance of showing their mettle should be given to them.

The IX Corps order left mere detail to the discretion of its very able and experienced divisional commanders. North of the Salt Lake the final garrison, consisting of the 11th Division, the 88th Brigade (29th Division) and the 39th Brigade (13th Division), would be withdrawn under the orders of Major-General E. A. Fanshawe, commanding the 11th Division. South of the Salt Lake, the remainder of the 13th Division and the 2nd Mounted Division would be withdrawn under the orders of Major-General F. S. Maude, commanding the 13th Division; but owing to the importance of close co-operation with the Anzac left flank, Major-General Peyton (2nd Mounted Division) would be responsible for withdrawing all the troops at the point of junction between the two corps before handing over his front to General Maude. Sketch 32.

As the distance of the front line from the beaches was greater at Suvla than at Anzac, the actual method of with-

¹ This detail was not decided upon until later.

Dec. drawal was also to be slightly different. All the front-line trenches were to be held till 1.30 A.M. on the final night; but small garrisons were to be maintained in addition at various points in the two reserve lines in each area until the final front-line garrisons had passed through. The commanders at each of these points would be furnished with details of the actual numbers to retire through their positions, and when these numbers had passed they would close the gaps in the wire, roll up their telephones, and withdraw their own parties.

As at Anzac, the front line would be thinned gradually, the remaining troops spreading out, and maintaining, till the last moment, the normal sniping activity. Br.-General C. J. Pecheval was placed in command of the forming-up places in Reserve Area A, on the northern horn of the bay. Major-General W. R. Marshall, 53rd Division, whose troops had been evacuated during the intermediate stage, was in command of the forming-up places near Lala Baba, and, under General Maude's orders, was responsible for all embarkation arrangements in Reserve Area B. Thirty-four guns were to be retained for the final stage.

No mines were to be fired, but contact-mines would be laid in front of each line of defence, and special patrols detailed to prevent retiring troops from entering these mine-fields. The route towards the gaps in the wire in both reserve lines would be marked at dusk with long streaks of flour.

Special arrangements were made by Wing-Captain F. H. Sykes, commanding the units of the Royal Naval Air Service, for a continuous aircraft patrol to be maintained in the Anzac—Suvla area from dawn to dusk throughout the final stage to deal with hostile aeroplanes.

In the naval orders for the final stage of the evacuation Admiral Wemyss appointed Captain C. F. Corbett, R.N., in the *Anemone*, to superintend the withdrawal from Suvla, and Captain Hon. A. D. Boyle, R.N., in the *Honeysuckle*, to superintend that from Anzac. Captain E. Unwin, V.C., R.N., would be Naval Transport Officer at Suvla, assisted by Acting-Commander G. F. A. Mulock, R.N., at C Beach, and Captain C. M. Staveley, R.N. would be Naval Transport Officer at Anzac. In addition to ten motor-lighters at each place, there was to be a large number of steamboats and other small craft, and the troops would eventually be transferred, for passage to Imbros and Mudros, to a fleet of troop-carriers consisting of the two old battleships *Magnificent* and *Mars* and about fifteen light-draught steamships. In addition, a reserve of four light-draught

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ships, each capable of holding about 1,000 men, would be Dec. retained at Imbros.

During the final stage two squadrons of covering ships would remain at Imbros, in instant readiness to proceed to the peninsula if their services should be required. But in order to maintain normal appearances, only the usual number of men-of-war was to remain in the vicinity of the beaches throughout this stage, and special care was to be taken that on each night, till evacuation was completed, all the vessels embarking troops were out of sight of the shore before daybreak.

On the morning of the 20th, if the evacuation had been safely completed and no wounded left ashore, orders would be issued for all ships to bombard and destroy the supplies left on the beach and to open fire on any enemy seen. If parties of wounded were still on shore, an attempt would be made to embark them under a flag of truce.

While all the foregoing preparations were being made, the intermediate stage, favoured by ideal weather, proceeded without a hitch. Every night the beaches hummed with activity, but every morning, before daylight, all was again silence and the sea devoid of ships. Camps, hitherto crowded, were fast emptying, but the appearance of normal activity was produced as far as possible by the maintenance of all fires and the continual moving about of troops in reserve.

The quiescence of the enemy was encouraging the hope that he still was unaware of what was happening. Each night his troops were digging hard, or improving their wire entanglements; and though the Turkish artillery fire in the northern zone had certainly increased in volume, this was more probably due to a larger supply of shells than to any more sinister cause. The reports that new guns, manned by German or Austrian personnel, had lately reached the peninsula appeared to be well founded. Not only was the volume of fire greater than hitherto, but its accuracy and distribution were also better, and so was the type of ammunition fired. Some new emplacements, too, had been seen by British airmen near Anafarta Sagir.¹ But the Turks showed no sign of preparing to assume

¹ At Helles, during the first half of December, the Turks were exceptionally quiet, and there was no sign of any increase in the strength of the Turkish artillery. General Davies had hit upon a plan for relieving the monotony of the troops' daily lives by starting a football competition for units of the VII Corps, and an interesting side-light is thrown upon local conditions at Helles by this entry—typical of many others—in the corps commander's diary: "11th Dec. Beach shelled at 10.45 A.M. Beach shelled again at 2 P.M. 15 shells. No damage. Four shells on beach during the night. Football tie, Anson v. Hood. Anson won."

At an earlier date another step taken by General Davies to keep up the

Dec. the offensive. The morale of their infantry had suffered from the intense cold at the end of November; desertions were becoming more frequent; and where the opposing trenches were in close touch the British superiority in bombing and sniping was now very pronounced.

Despite the successful progress of the intermediate stage, however, and all the careful arrangements for the final stage, two dangers remained as an ever-haunting nightmare throughout this critical time. One was the fear of the secret leaking out, and the other the dread of a sudden change in the weather. Up to the last moment the possibility of keeping the enemy in ignorance of the evacuation seemed almost too much to hope for. Not only had the English press contained repeated references to the possibility of a withdrawal, but the numerous islands in the *Ægean* were known to be infested with spies, whose coming and going it was almost impossible to prevent. There was also the fear of an indiscreet word by sick or wounded in Egypt, or by a British soldier captured on patrol. Both at Anzac and Suvla praiseworthy efforts had been made to keep the secret as long as possible, but the gradual withdrawal of guns and stores had led to rumours in the trenches even before the real truth had been admitted to divisional commanders. On the 30th November, when a junior staff officer from G.H.Q., who had himself been told nothing, was visiting a front-line trench at Suvla, he was given the astounding news by an Irish soldier. "You fellows had a bad time in the blizzard", said the officer sympathetically. "We had indeed, sir", answered the man, "but this grand news about evacuation is putting new life into us!"

It was impossible to exaggerate the preponderating influence that the weather would exert on the course of the operation. Even a stiff breeze would seriously impede progress, while anything in the nature of a gale would smash the piers, wreck the small craft, and bring the plan to disaster.

For the first time since the opening of the campaign, however, it seemed that the gods were whole-heartedly on the side of the Expeditionary Force. Day after day the Turks remained inactive, and day after day the sea was a flat calm. By the morning of the 18th the intermediate stage was completed, and all that was left ashore was a total garrison of 40,000 men, 50 guns, a few animals and carts, and a greatly reduced quantity of supplies and stores

spirits of the men was to start a pipe band in the 52nd Division, which played "Retreat" every evening behind the support line.

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The completion of the intermediate stage had been helped Dec. by the length of the winter nights; there were nearly twelve hours of darkness in every twenty-four. These long nights would also be of inestimable value in completing the final stage. Granted calm weather, as much could be done in two nights in December as in double that time in June.

At Suvla, thanks to the convenient deep-water jetties and Map 4. piers, with tram lines running down to them, which, under the immediate supervision of Lieut.-Colonel R. V. Jellicoe, R.E., had been constructed in the rocky inlets on the northern shore of the bay, the salving of heavy stores had been a far easier task than at Anzac, where the open beach had prevented the development of any such facilities. At Suvla, too, it had been possible to keep three large store ships continuously in the bay for loading animals and stores; whereas at Anzac, owing to the reported presence of submarines, and to the fact that it was unusual for large ships to lie at that anchorage, this could not be done. None the less, there was still a vast quantity of valuable material which would have to be destroyed and abandoned. By the incessant hard work of the administrative services during the preceding three months a large reserve of most of the requirements of an army had been steadily accumulated, and it was manifestly impossible to clear these huge depots in secret in the course of ten days. It happened, therefore, that even at Suvla vast heaps of valuable stores were ruthlessly but unavoidably prepared for burning on the final night. Blankets and bayonets, boots and water-bottles, socks and woollen gloves, tarpaulin sheets and even motor-bicycles were remorselessly thrown on the fire heaps, while near Kangaroo Pier, on another funeral pyre, were a full fortnight's rations for 40,000 men.

At Anzac, though evacuation was generally accepted as the wisest course to pursue, there were many in the corps to whom the thought of abandoning the position, which they had fought so hard to capture and laboured so long to hold, was in every way distasteful. Many would have preferred an order to renew the attack, and amongst the troops in the front line there was a general belief that the Turks were beaten men. Throughout the whole corps, moreover, whatever the view might be on the main question, there was intense regret at abandoning the graves of their comrades. Up to the very last the men were visiting the cemeteries, erecting new crosses, or tidying up the grave of a dead friend. "I hope", said one of them to General Birdwood on the last morning, as he pointed to a cemetery, "I hope *they* won't hear us marching back to the beach."

18 Dec. By the morning of the 18th December the evacuation had entered upon its most critical stage. Both at Anzac and Suvla there was still an ample garrison to hold the existing positions against a serious attack. But even a minor engagement might seriously interrupt the night's programme; every hour the chances of discovery were increasing; and the meteorological experts were predicting an early end to the fine weather. Throughout the day, however, there was no unusual stir in the enemy's lines. The Turkish artillery fire remained normal, and the sea continued calm.

Soon after dusk the first parties to be embarked were started off to the beach. The strictest silence was preserved; there was no smoking; troops moved in close formation to the forming-up places, and were directed thence to the beach in parties of 400, the capacity of a motor-lighter. At the same time from Mudros and Imbros the steamers and motor-lighters crept quietly in to the shore.

At Anzac there were four berths for transports, two opposite Anzac Cove and two opposite Ocean Beach. At seven o'clock four troop-carriers arrived at these berths, and as soon as each ship had received its complement of men it returned to Imbros or Mudros. A second batch of ships arrived at ten o'clock, and a third an hour after midnight. These vessels were mostly small Channel passenger steamers, but the first batch included the old battleship *Mars*, on this occasion accommodating no less than 2,000 men. The risk of submarines was a grave one, but risks had to be run.

The first batch of ships at Anzac took away 4,100 men, the second batch 3,000, and the third batch 2,800. The arrangements at Suvla were similar; but at that place, owing to the constant presence in the bay of large transports, the evacuation of horses, vehicles and guns could, if opportunity offered, continue till the last moment.

Both at Suvla and Anzac the programme for this night was completed without a casualty and without the smallest hitch. The Turks, utterly unaware of what was happening, continued to improve their defences, and two Turkish deserters surrendered to the IX Corps.

The operation had been favoured with ideal weather. A full moon, hidden by light clouds, had made movement easy, restraining at the same time the unwelcome boldness of enemy patrols. The sea was as smooth as unruffled silk, and in the early morning a kindly mist was helping to hide from the enemy the deserted appearance of the beaches and back areas.

During the ensuing day every effort was made by the small

remaining garrison to simulate a normal activity. Parties of 19 Dec. men were detailed to show themselves at conspicuous corners, all fires and incinerators were kept burning—there was all too much to burr—and mules and carts were driven round and round like a stage army. Even after dark, in order to produce the customary sound of the jingling ration convoys, empty carts were sent on a last journey to the line, returning to the beach with blankets, cooking pots and stores.

For the troops in the trenches, as also for the military and naval beach personnel, few days can ever have dragged more slowly than that short winter's day of Sunday the 19th December. At Anzac the Turks showed no unusual activity, but at Suvla intense concern was caused for a few hours by the action of the Turkish gunners. There, about eleven o'clock in the morning, the lately-arrived battery of Austrian 6-inch howitzers began to shell the neighbourhood of Lala Baba with high-explosive shell, and was apparently ranging on South Pier, where the majority of the troops in the southern area would embark. The ammunition was different to what had been seen before, and was evidently the much-heralded supply which was coming from Austria, or Germany. Instead of the usual proportion of harmless shells, every round detonated with a shattering roar which, though well known to the army in France, was not a familiar sound on the Gallipoli peninsula. Watched by the anxious eyes of the embarkation staff, the shells crept nearer and nearer till at last the pier was hit. The guns then switched their fire and began to range on the very spot which had been chosen as the main forming-up place for the troops that night on their way down to the beach. For a moment these tactics provoked the keenest anxiety, but later it was realized that the choice of target could only be a coincidence, and that the Turks could not be aware of the real importance of the point at which they were aiming. Altogether some 50 rounds were fired, every one with perfect detonation. But the neighbourhood was so deserted that there was only one casualty, and the damage to the pier was repaired in a few hours.¹

To assist in distracting the enemy's attention from Suvla

¹ The guns still remaining at Suvla responded vigorously to this shelling, and the value of having kept these guns on shore till the end is disclosed by Colonel (later General) Kannengiesser, at that time in command of the Turkish troops opposed to the IX Corps, who wrote of the 19th December: "I personally did not believe the English would evacuate. . . . At 11 A.M. our howitzer battery on Ismail Tepe shelled Lala Baba, and Ismail Tepe was at once shelled by several enemy guns. The usual picture. The officer commanding the heavy artillery produced his fire record that evening, and proved that the enemy batteries had maintained their accustoméd fire throughout the 18th and 19th December." "Gallipoli", p. 208.

19 Dec. and Anzac, General Birdwood had ordered the VIII Corps commander at Helles to undertake some small offensive action on the afternoon of the 19th. General Davies accordingly launched two small attacks, covered by the explosion of mines. One of the mines unfortunately failed to form a crater, and troops of the 42nd Division, who advanced under cover of its explosion, found themselves in the open and were compelled to withdraw. Elsewhere the troops successfully assaulted their objectives and repulsed a series of counter-attacks during the night. The report of this action helped to prevent the Turkish Commander-in-Chief from suspecting that evacuation was in progress.

Meanwhile, long before the fighting at Helles had died down, the last act in the northern zone had begun.

Sketch
31.

On this final night the method of embarkation at Anzac differed slightly from the procedure of the night before. In order to save time, the last parties on the extreme flanks were to embark in ships' boats from the open beach close to their respective positions, and then to be transferred to trawlers for passage direct to Mudros. The naval staff would have liked to adopt this procedure on both nights, but corps headquarters had urged that it was unsafe to bring tows of boats so close to Gaba Tepe except at the last moment. An ingenious method was adopted to hide the embarkation on Brighton Beach from the look-outs on Gaba Tepe. For several successive nights previous to the final night the destroyer which always lay off the Anzac right flank switched her searchlight upon a point on the beach a little south of the most southerly Australian trench, and kept it there as a fixed beam for half an hour. The constant repetition of this practice served to lull Turkish suspicions, and on the final night the garrison of the trench withdrew unobserved, for it was impossible for the enemy to see through the searchlight ray.

The successive echelons of troops to embark at Anzac on this night were: A parties, to be withdrawn from their trenches at dusk, 4,000; B parties, to be withdrawn between 9 P.M. and 11 P.M., 4,000; and C parties, to begin withdrawal at 1 A.M., 2,000. Portions of these last parties—275 strong—were to man an inner line of posts at No. 1 Post, Walker's Ridge, Plugge's, and MacLagan's Ridge, to protect the beaches during the last hours of the embarkation.

The hour of final withdrawal from the front line depended upon the distance of each trench from the point of embarkation, and was governed by the decision that the line on the extreme left was not to be finally vacated till 1.30 A.M. On the

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extreme right, where the trenches were nearer to the beach, 19 Dec. the last troops would leave at 2 A.M. The hour of withdrawal in other parts of the position became gradually later towards the centre, till at Russell's Top the final withdrawal was not to take place till half past three.¹

In order to leaden the sound of marching where the trenches were close to the enemy's line, the hard floors of the trenches had been broken up with picks, and the men's boots were covered with rocks or sacking. All piers were similarly covered with sacks. The routes to be used by the troops in moving to the beach were specially marked at points where there was any chance of confusion. In some cases long streaks of salt or flour were used. At other points there were shaded candles in biscuit boxes. Special traffic-officers and police were posted at intervals to direct men who had lost their way and regulate the flow of traffic.

Many ingenious tricks had been devised for firing rifles in the front line after the last parties had withdrawn. In some cases a string was attached to a trigger in such a way that when the necessary weight was applied the rifle would go off.² Other devices for firing rifles and bombs were made with lengths of slow-burning fuze, or with candles and string; and all along the line, both at Anzac and Suvla, there would be occasional shots from the front-line trenches for at least half an hour after the last men had gone.

As on the previous night, the withdrawal was carried out both at Anzac and Suvla with clock-like precision. At Anzac, General Godley had issued orders that, once the movement had begun, it was to be completed as far as possible, and that, even if the enemy attacked, no troops who had already started for the beach were to interrupt their march except by the direct order of the rearguard commander. But throughout the night the Turks showed no suspicion, and all along the line could be heard the normal noises of digging or putting up wire.

¹ Except on the extreme left flank the method adopted by the Australian and New Zealand Divisions was to divide their C parties into three equal echelons, called C1, C2 and C3. Thus, at Lone Pine, the 24th Battalion's C party (9 officers and 94 men) would hold their position till 2.15 A.M., when C1 (4 officers and 26 men) would withdraw. At 2.45 A.M. 2 more officers and 34 men would leave. Three officers and 34 men would hold the line for 15 minutes longer, and at 3 A.M. the position would be finally vacated.

² The method of exerting this weight was as follows: two kerosene oil tins were placed one above the other, the top one full of water and the bottom one, with the trigger-string attached to it, empty. At the last minute small holes would be punched in the upper tin; water would trickle into the lower one; and the rifle would fire as soon as the lower tin had become sufficiently heavy.

20 Dec. At half past one, after all the B parties had embarked without incident, General Russell himself left the shore, handing over command to Colonel Paton; and at that moment on the extreme left of the line the final withdrawal began.

So well had everything gone that it was now possible to advance the moment for the last parties in the old Anzac line to retire. At 2.40 A.M. Lone Pine was vacated, the last batch of men moving silently back from posts in some places within five yards of the enemy. At 2.55 A.M. Quinn's and Pope's were abandoned, and Russell's Top was the only front-line post still held.

At 3.14 A.M. Russell's Top was in turn abandoned; ten minutes later the last man vacated Walker's Ridge; and at half past three, the whole garrison being now clear of the hills, Lieut. J. P. Caddy of the engineers was ordered to fire the mine on Russell's Top.

Though the roar of this explosion was answered by a storm of rifle fire all along the Turkish line, there was no shelling of the beaches, and at 4 A.M. the last lighter headed out to sea. Colonel Paton, Captain Staveley, R.N., and a few others remained on the deserted beach for ten minutes longer in case any stragglers arrived. But there were none left to come. At 4.10 A.M. these officers pushed quietly off in a waiting picket-boat, and the evacuation of Anzac was complete.

Sketch
32.

At Suvla the final night's programme was carried out with the same orderliness as at Anzac, and the same amazing success. Here, too, the Turks remained in ignorance of the retirement till after daybreak, and so complete was the surprise that long after the front line had been evacuated at 1.30 A.M. the enemy continued firing at the empty trenches in front of them.

In order to make the night as normal as possible, the guns still remaining on shore continued in action for some hours after dusk, and fired the usual quantity of ammunition. Every gun and howitzer was then withdrawn to the beach and sent away.

In General Maude's sector the final garrison of the front line had filed through the Salt Lake defences by 2.30 A.M. Three quarters of an hour later the inner defences of Lala Baba had been passed and the gaps in the wire closed, and at four o'clock General Maude and his staff were the last to leave the shore.

In General Fanshawe's sector the embarkation proceeded on practically identical lines, but there, owing to some delay on the extreme left flank, it was just after 5 A.M. when the rear party, with General Fanshawe and divisional headquarters,

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Retirement of the Rear Parties, Night 19th/20th Dec.



Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

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embarked at Suvla Cove. The final act was the firing of the 20 Dec. supply depot, previously soaked with petrol; and it was in the lurid glow of this conflagration that the last picket-boat, with Captain Unwin, V.C., and Colonel H. L. N. Beynon, the Principal Military Embarkation Officer, steamed out of the bay.

Since the 8th December, when orders to evacuate were received, the total numbers withdrawn from Anzac and Suvla amounted to 83,048 officers and men, 186 guns, nearly 2,000 vehicles, and 4,695 horses and mules. At Suvla not a single casualty was suffered on the final night, and not a wagon, gun, horse, mule, or donkey was left ashore. At Anzac the total casualties amounted to one man wounded early in the evening, and one hit in the arm by a spent bullet when his lighter was leaving the beach. Nine guns and howitzers—all of which were previously destroyed—were abandoned by the Anzac corps, but all save one were worn out and practically useless. Twenty mules and 50 donkeys, which were needed to the last moment, were left ashore at Anzac, and the stack of supplies, which was set on fire and partially destroyed, consisted of 200,000 rations. Practically all the gun ammunition at Anzac was saved, and all the small-arm ammunition except five million rounds. This, as no sea-transport was available to take it away, was thrown into the sea.

As for the Turks, it is now known that, despite the frequent rumours which had reached them on the subject of evacuation, the admirable arrangements at Anzac and Suvla had persuaded them to believe that the idea had been abandoned. Even the report of a large number of ships at Imbros on the evening of the 19th had not disclosed the secret, for it was held that this might equally point to the arrival of reinforcements and another British attack. Several senior officers, in the course of the last week of occupation, had issued orders for increased vigilance, but any attempt to reach the British line was met by fire, and reports were frequent that the British trenches were held in normal strength.

It was not until after daybreak on the 20th that the suspicions aroused, first by the explosion of the mine on Russell's Top,² then by the burning dumps, and finally by the utter

¹ Four 18-pdrs., two 5-inch howitzers, one 12-pdr. A.A. gun (in good condition), one 3-pdr., and one 4.7-inch naval gun.

² The Turks claim that after the explosion of the mine a party was rushed forward to seize the crater, and that this led to the discovery that some of the Anzac trenches on Russell's Top were empty. But the news came back slowly; no immediate attempt was made by the forward troops

20 Dec. silence, began to assume the proportions of a certainty, and even then the thick mist which overhung the beaches that morning, and the number of contact-mines on the Suvla front, demanded cautious action. About 7 A.M., however, following a heavy bombardment of the empty British positions, small parties of the enemy began to approach the beach. British cruisers had meanwhile stood in to the shore to complete the destruction of the piles of burning stores, and it was only after dark that the Turks were left in undisputed possession.

The success of the evacuation, a success far greater than anyone had dared to expect, was due in equal measure to the perfection of the plans, the co-operation between the naval and military staffs, the precision of the naval transport service, and the admirable bearing of the rank and file at a time when any momentary lapse of discipline might have ruined the undertaking. Above all was it due, in the opinion of those most intimately concerned, to a spell of marvellous fortune or the direct intervention of Providence. Without good weather the best-laid plans would have been of no avail, and it was the season of winter gales. Yet from the moment the evacuation was ordered the sea remained as smooth as a village pond. Sixteen hours after the last boat left the shore a fierce gale sprang up, which, 24 hours earlier, must surely have led to disaster.

At home the news that the dreaded operation had been completed without the loss of a single life was received by the Government with unfeigned relief; while in the world at large the tactical success of the withdrawal went far to counterbalance its admission of strategic failure. "As long as wars last", wrote a military correspondent in the *Vossische Zeitung*, "the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac will stand before the eyes of all strategists as a hitherto unattained masterpiece."

to clear up the situation; and though orders to attack were issued before 7 A.M., the advance of the troops was very hesitating and cautious.